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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the diagnostic effectiveness of the Language Assessment Tasks (LAT) in differentiating language disordered students from nonhandicapped students. LAT was administered individually to two groups of subjects (experimental and control) matched for sex, race, and birthdate (ages 9-14 years). The performances of each group of subjects were analyzed by subtest items and for each language modality--comprehension, production, language content, and communicative competence. For data analysis and for grouping the subjects by language modalities, a numerical scoring system was developed. In all cases, the nonhandicapped subjects had higher performance scores. Not all subtests were useful in differentiating learning disabled subjects from the nonhandicapped, and many of the LAT items were equally difficult for learning disabled and nonhandicapped subjects. Correlation did not show a relationship between age and performance and sex and performance. Thirty-three percent of the test items were found to be effective in discriminating the language disabled students from the nonhandicapped students, and 17 percent were equally difficult for both groups of subjects. It was concluded that LAT can be utilized as a criterion referenced instrument with those items shown to differentiate the language disabled students from the nonhandicapped students. Modifications of scoring procedures are suggested. The specific findings are illustrated in four figures following the study. (JAZ)

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Summary of Poster Session, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association annual convention, 1985

Title: Investigating the Language Assessment Tasks with Learning Disabled Children

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Abstract: This investigation into the effectiveness of the Language Assessment Tasks examined modality and subtest items for identification of language disordered children, ages 9-11 to 14-9 years. Control and experimental subjects were assigned to performance categories (mastered, emerging, or remediation required) for the subtests and modalities. Some subtests did not identify language handicapped students. Modification in scoring procedures are suggested.

Purpose

This study investigated the diagnostic effectiveness of the Language Assessment Tasks (LAT, Kellman, Flood, & Yoder, 1978) in differentiating language disordered students from non-handicapped students.

The LAT was administered to two groups of subjects matched for sex, race, and birthdate, ages 9 years, 11 months through 14 years, 9 months. The experimental group consisted of 10 subjects (four black males, four white males, and two white females) with a psychoeducational diagnosis of learning disability. The control group consisted of 10 subjects (four black males, four white males, and two white females) without a history of speech or language disorders and who were functioning in the average range academically. The LAT was administered to each subject individually. Test time ranged between 1½ hours and 2 hours. The performances of each group of subjects were analyzed by subtest items and for each language modality -- comprehension, production, language content, and communicative competence.

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Results and Discussion

For data analysis and to group the subjects' language modalities, a numerical scoring system was developed. Subjects were assigned to three performance categories based on percentage of correct responses for the different modalities and subtests. Three performance categories, Remediation Required (0-59% correct), Emerging Ability (60-79% correct), and Mastery (80-100% correct), were utilized rather than the cognitive level table recommended by the authors because numerical scores permitted comparisons between groups.

In all cases, the nonhandicapped subjects had higher performance scores, scoring at the Mastery level, more often than the learning disabled subjects (See figure 1). Several, but not all, subtests were found to be useful in differentiating learning disabled subjects from nonhandicapped subjects. Some subtests did not differentiate the learning disabled subjects from nonhandicapped students because the learning disabled subjects scored on the Mastery performance level. Many of the LAT items were equally difficult for both the learning disabled subjects and the nonhandicapped subjects.

When the scores for each group of subjects were examined for a correlation between age and performance and for a correlation between sex and performance, relationships were not found. The absence of a correlation between the variables of age and score may be an important factor in some of the subtests not differentiating the learning disabled subjects from the non-handicapped and may account for Mastery by the learning disabled students on some tasks.

Thirty-three percent of the test items on the LAT were found to be effective in discriminating the language disabled students from the nonhandicapped students (See figure 2). These include nine subtests from the areas of syntax, semantics, comprehension, spatial relations, classification, and auditory memory. The area of semantics was difficult for the language disabled students with performance scores indicating remediation was required.

Seventeen percent of the test items were equally difficult for both groups of subjects (See figure 3). Scores on the remainder of the LAT subtests were mastered by both groups. These include syntax items such as comparative relationships, semantic terms such as "wh" questions, and language content categories. (See figure 4).

Conclusions

Based on this study, it is concluded that the LAT can be utilized as a criterion referenced instrument with those items shown to differentiate the language disabled student from the nonhandicapped student. This is based on the fact that many items did not differentiate between the learning disabled and nonhandicapped children and no correlation was found between age and performance on test scores.

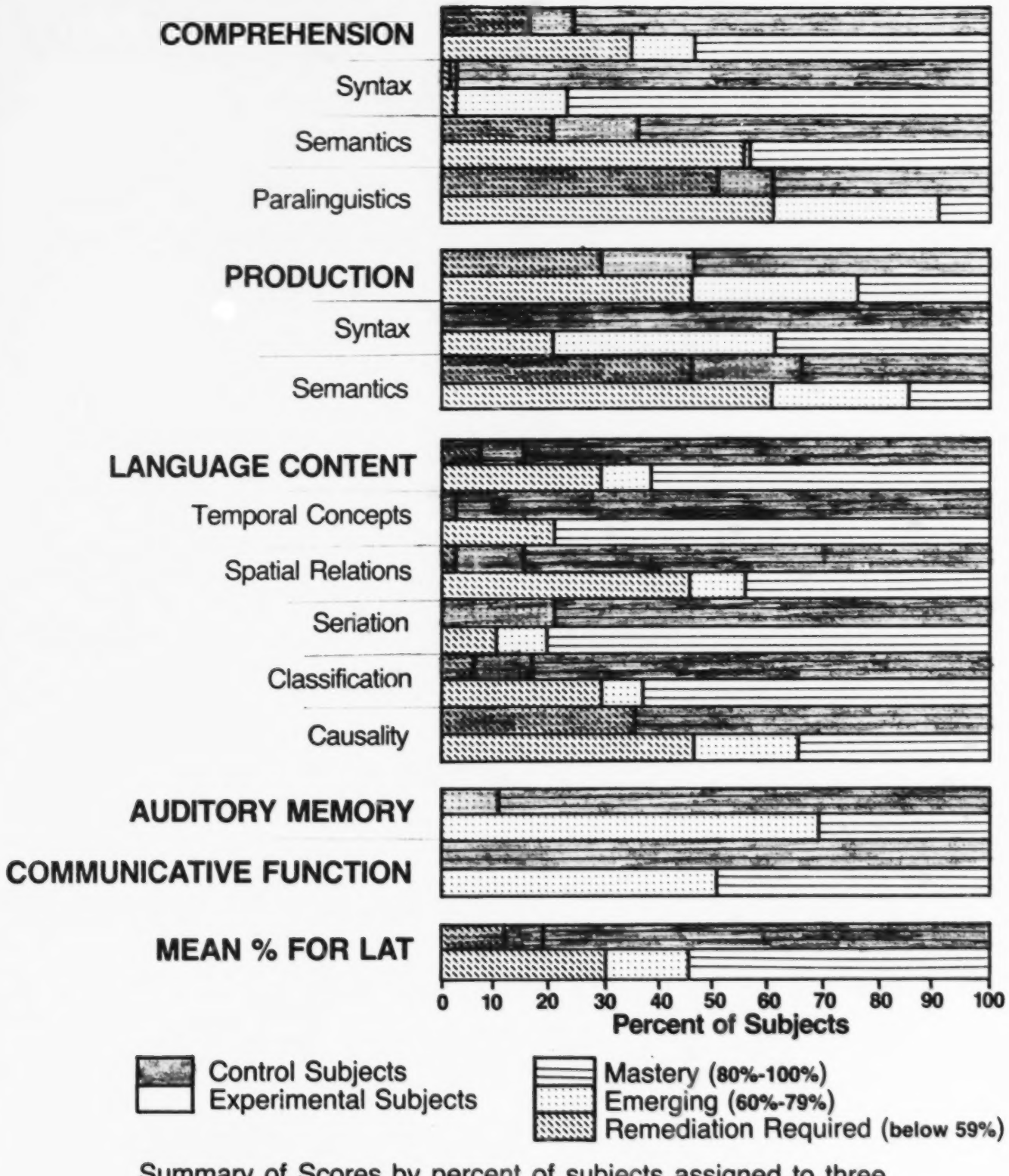
Selected items may be used as screening items, particularly the items that identified the language disabled students. Item analysis would improve the usefulness of the LAT. Some test items may be beneficial for assessment of children with more severe language disorders than the experimental subjects of this study. The handicapped subjects of this investigation have been receiving treatment and their Mastery levels may reflect this intervention.

Modification of scoring procedures and clarification of instructions within the LAT are recommended to assure that the LAT is administered consistently and is interpreted to show strengths and weaknesses validly. Scoring by cognitive levels proved ambiguous and was not found useful to describe the language disabilities of the subjects of this study. Reliability of administration for selected test items would be increased by clarification in procedures.

These conclusions cannot be generalized without additional study. Further investigation into the language abilities of young adolescents can provide information on how to assess and manage language handicaps. Assessment procedures such as the LAT are important for serving this age group.

FIGURE 1

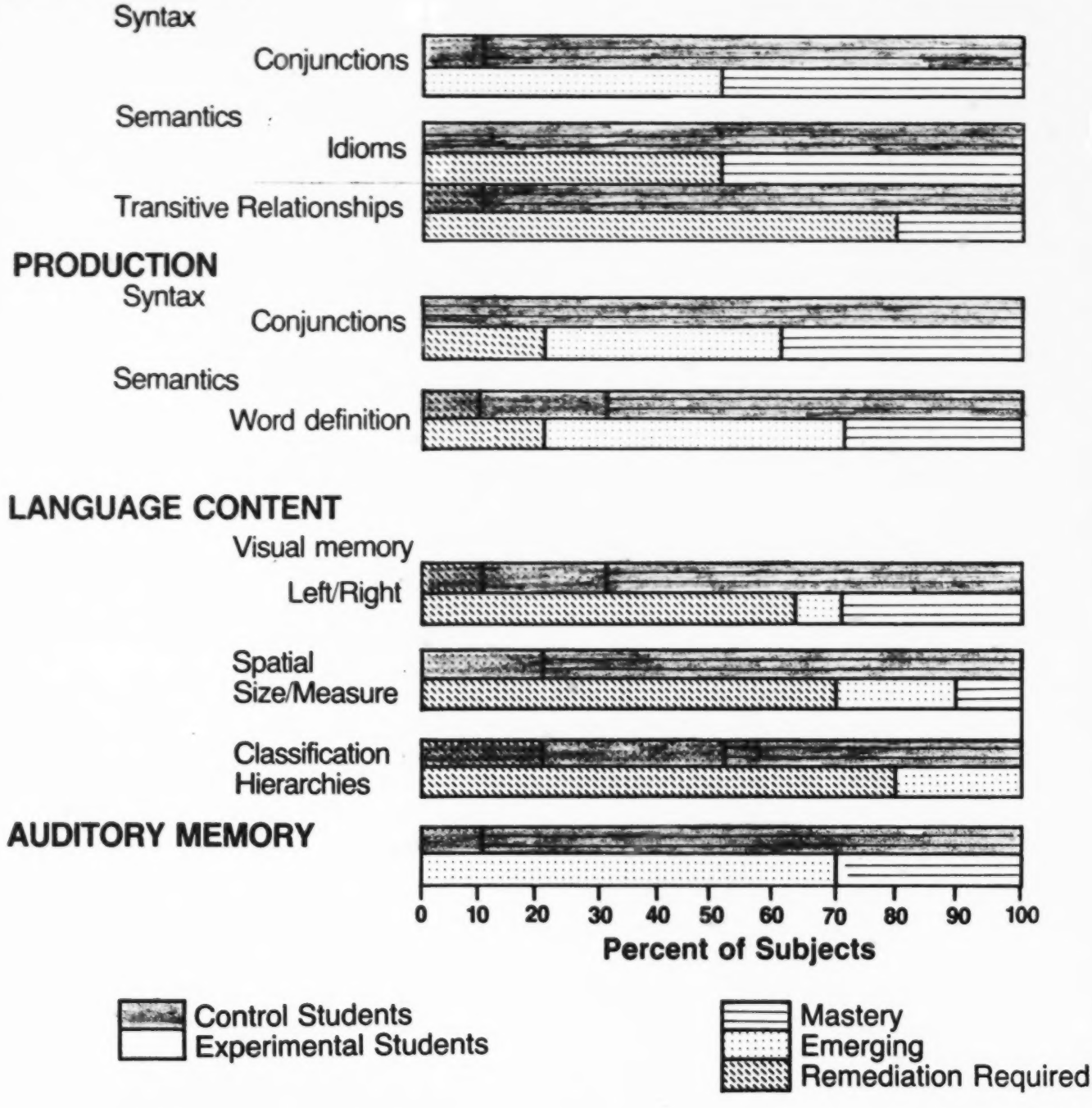
Fig 1



Summary of Scores by percent of subjects assigned to three performance categories by modality and subtests.

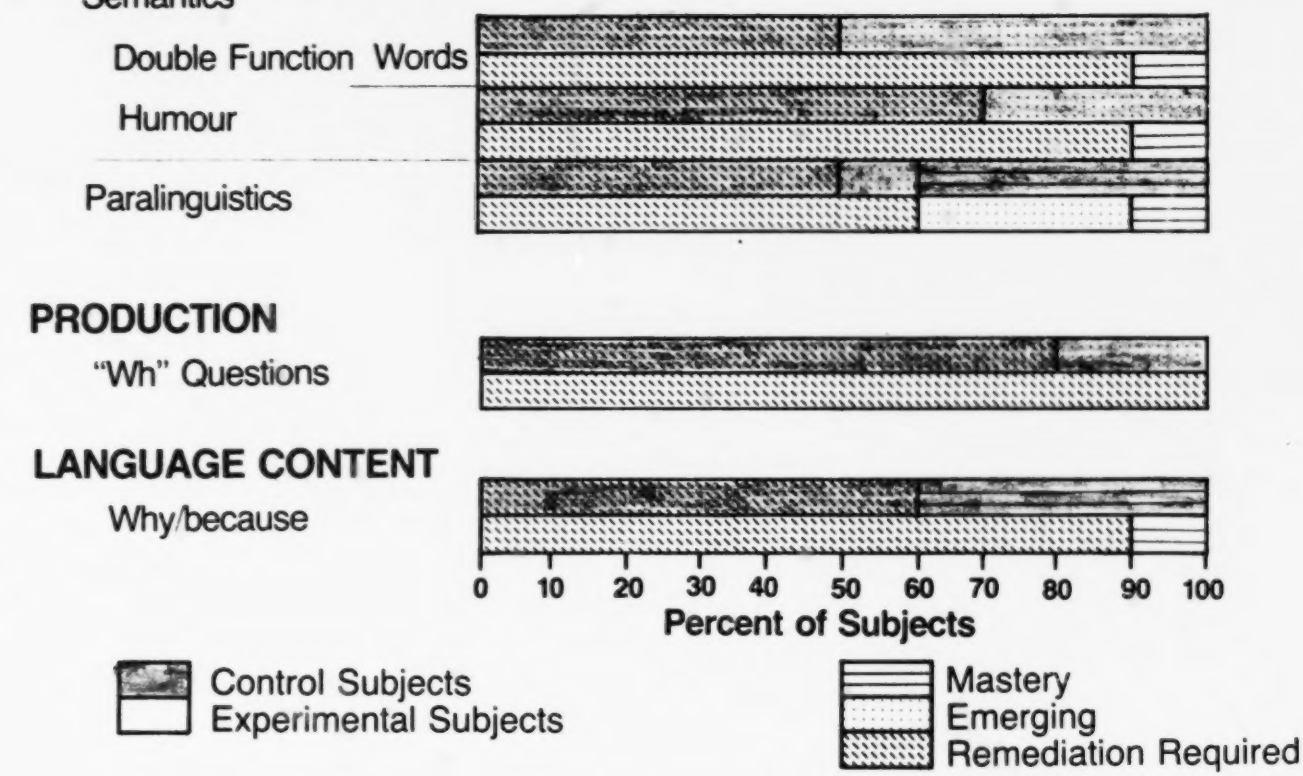
FIGURE 2

Fig 2



LAT subtests that **differentiated** learning disabled students from nonhandicapped students charted by percent of subjects scoring at three levels, **mastery** (80%-100%), **emerging** (60%-79%), and **remediation required** (below 59%).

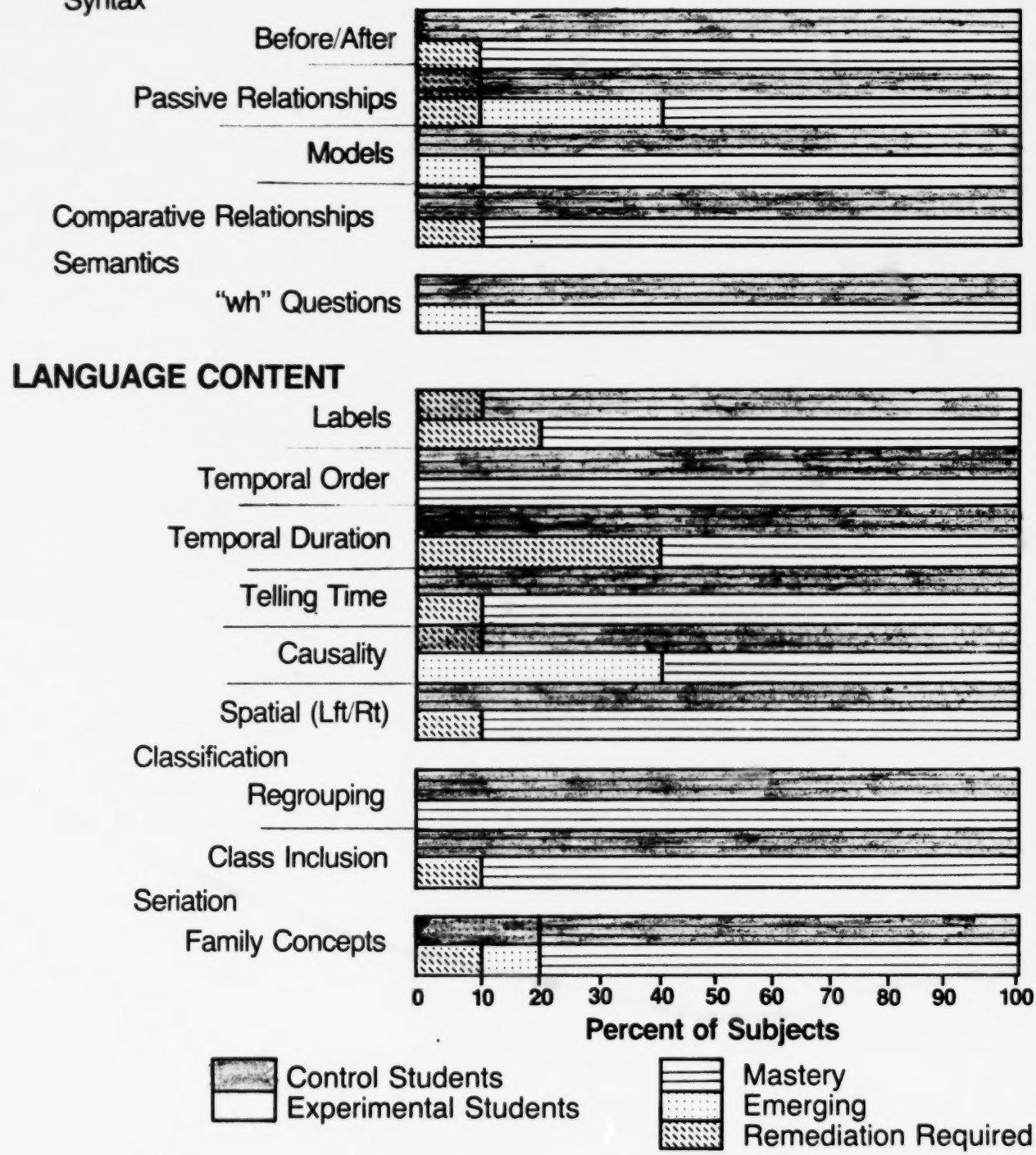
FIGURE 3



LAT subtests that were **equally difficult** for both learning disabled students and nonhandicapped students charted by percent of subjects at three levels, **mastery** (80%-100%), **emerging** (60%-79%), and **remediation required** (below 59%).

FIGURE 4

Fig. 4



LAT subtests that **did not differentiate** learning disabled students from nonhandicapped students charted by percent of subjects scoring at three levels, **Mastery** (80%-100%), **emerging** (60%-79%) and **remediation required** (below 59%).